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## EDWARD GREENE MALBONE

EDWARD GREENE MALBONE,<sup>1</sup> America's greatest painter of portraits on ivory, was born at Newport, R. I., in August, 1777, and died at Savannah, Ga., May 7, 1807.

"Malbone was peculiarly fortunate in living his short professional life at the very inception of the nineteenth century. The country had fully recovered from the disastrous effects of the War of the Revolution. The adoption of the constitution, and the subsidence of the mutual jealousies long existing between the separate colonies had developed a strong national spirit and an enthusiasm for things American, with its encouragement for native craftsmen sadly lacking to-day. Pride in past achievements walked hand in hand with the stern realization of the duty of building for the future. A desire for education and the finer things of life was springing up. The patronage given to home manufacturers was extended to those working in science, literature, and art; an encouragement which made possible the achievements notably of Fulton in science, of Cooper, Irving, Paulding, and later Poe and Hawthorne in literature, and Stuart, Morse, Vanderlyn, and others in art.

"Malbone's ancestry was thoroughly American. His great grandfather, Peter Malbone, was born February 10, 1667, and died at Norfolk, Va., May 26, 1738, in the vicinity of which his son Godfrey was born January 18, 1695. Godfrey Malbone, as was the case with his distinguished grandson, matured early in life and settled in Newport, R. I., where, in 1718, in the deed in which he took title to a piece of land on Thames Street for his 'Mansion House,' he is styled 'Capt. Godfrey Malbone, Mariner.' He was one of New England's princely merchant navigators, and early acquired a fortune in the then eminently respectable trade of importing rum from the West Indies and slaves from Africa, and later turned many an honest

and patriotic dollar in fitting out his ships to act as privateersmen during the wars with France. His house on Miantonomoh Hill was notable among the finest dwellings in the colonies for its sumptuous furnishings and lavish use of mahogany in its door and circular stairway leading to the cupola. Its dimensions were sixty-four by fifty-two feet and it was topped by a double pitched roof with dormer windows and surrounded by elaborate gardens.

"In 1719 Godfrey Malbone married Catharine Scott, by whom he had ten children, the eighth of whom, John, born August 21, 1735, was the father of Edward Greene Malbone, the subject of this sketch.

"From early childhood Malbone evidenced great interest in the study of prints. The family were living in seclusion. Malbone spent much of his playtime alone in his room, drawing and painting in colors of his own manufacture. His devotion to art and its kindred subjects was discouraged at home as his father believed it would interfere with success in the profession chosen for him. At the age of fifteen his drawings of heads gave him a local reputation, which two years later was added to by the voluntary painting of scenes for the local theatre—a field far removed from that in which he made his reputation. It was at this period that he began his lifelong friendship with Washington Allston, then at school at Newport.

"In 1794 Malbone disappeared from his home and went to Providence, R. I., where he established himself as a miniature painter, which fact some weeks later he announced to his father in the following letter:

'PROVIDENCE, OCT. 11th, 1794.

'HONORED SIRE:—

'Pardon me for leaving Newport so abruptly without informing you of my intention to stay at Providence, nor would I have you think me so bigoted to ingratitude as not to wish to repay with future services the many favours I have received from you, as I thought it was highly necessary for me to do something I chuse this for my first attempt which is like to prove successful

<sup>1</sup>The following paragraphs are quoted, with permission, from an article entitled *Malbone and his Miniatures*, in *Scribner's Magazine* for May, 1910, by R. T. Haines Halsey.

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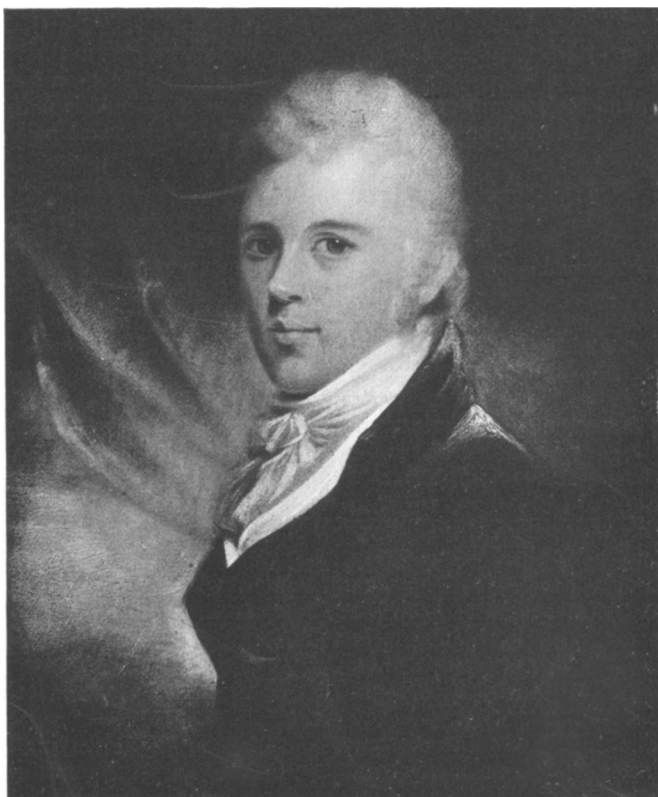
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PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF  
BY  
EDWARD GREENE MALBONE

as I have hitherto been fortunate enough to give general satisfaction and have met with publick approbation. I hope I may never be guilty of an action that may merit your displeasure & sincerely wish that I may soon be able to render the family those services which cannot yet be expected; it shall be my fervent prayer that I may be qualified to succeed you (in that respect) before you make your exit. I must conclude with making use of that name which I shall study never to dishonour.

'Your dutiful son,  
'EDWARD G. MALBONE.'

'JOHN MALBONE, ESQ.'

"In this letter we see that the seventeen-year-old Malbone showed a stern realization of the step which he had taken, and a sense of responsibility to sisters and beloved mother, a sense of responsibility that repeatedly obliged him to forego opportunities for study abroad offered him by friends who recognized his talent. It foreshadowed also his devotion to the material needs of his family and the resulting overwork which laid his system open to the pulmonary trouble which caused his early death.

"In 1796 Malbone moved to Boston, where he was successful in obtaining many sitters, and while there was able to renew his friendship with Washington Allston, then a student at Harvard.

"During the next three years Malbone was eagerly sought as a painter in New York, Philadelphia, and Newport. In the late summer of 1800 his failing health made it advisable that he avoid the rigor of the northern winters and he went to Charleston, where shortly he was joined by Washington Allston. Orders poured in to his studio and the peculiar hospitality for which this southern city has always been famed opened up to him the homes of its people. It was accentuated by the endearing qualities of the young northern painter. Much of his leisure time was spent in the company of Charles Fraser, then a law student, and later a miniaturist,

whose work is second only to Malbone's in this country.

"In May, 1801, the profits from his brush allowed Malbone to accompany Allston on a long looked-for trip abroad. His reception by Benjamin West is thus recorded by Charles Fraser, when writing of his friend: 'When in England he was introduced to the president of the Royal Academy, who, conceiving a high opinion of his talents, gave him free access to his study, and showed him those marked and friendly attentions which were more flattering than empty praises to the mind of his young countryman. He even encouraged him to remain in England, assuring him that he had nothing to fear from professional competition. But he preferred his own country, and returned to Charleston in the winter of 1801.'

"During the next two years he filled many engagements in the cities along the seaboard. His charm and personality made him more than welcome everywhere. However, he allowed nothing to interfere with the eight hours a day set aside for his profession. The confinement to his studio wore on his constitution, and in 1805 he was obliged to give up work and seek to reestablish his health. The next year he went to Jamaica where he failed to secure the hoped-for benefit. In December he returned to the United States and landed at Savannah where he died on the 7th day of May, 1807, at the home of his cousin, Robert Mackay.

"Malbone's reputation rests on the correct drawing and acute discernment of character, always present in his portraits, coupled with harmony and truth in coloring. His portraits show the absence of forced and theatrical effects. Practically all his work was done when relying upon inspiration derived from within. Occasionally, . . . when his inspiration was gained from without, he failed to secure the frankness and honesty so predominant in the work done under the influence of his own intuition.

"The English School of painters alone made any impression upon him. When viewing together with him in London the examples of Titian, Veronese, Rembrandt,

and others on exhibition, Washington Allston recorded his horror at Malbone's pointing to a portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence and saying that he would rather possess it than all the other pictures of the collection. Malbone's work showed great sanity and was not affected by mannerisms. He painted portraits, not types, in which he differed from his great English contemporaries, Cosway and Shelley. All his pictures show his ability to adapt himself to his sitter's moods. He was not self-centered; his work was even; and he never sacrificed character to prettiness."

The Museum possesses five miniatures by Malbone, of which one, a Portrait of Martha Washington Greene, was a gift of Misses Sarah and Josephine Lazarus in 1888; the other four, purchases in later years. To this representation of Malbone's work is now added by purchase a portrait in oil, measuring  $11\frac{1}{8}$  in. in height and  $9\frac{5}{16}$  in. in width, of Malbone himself. Notwithstanding the suavity of the picture, there is a certain inexperience shown in the handling of the material, as would be expected in one who, with a remarkable skill in one branch of painting, makes an essay in a different medium. To a degree it has the look of being a miniature enlarged, the drawing having just about the accentuation that would be satisfactory in a miniature. One can see that the thought of Stuart's work was in the artist's mind. The composition, particularly in the red curtain back of the head and the bit of sky in the corner below, recalls Stuart's arrangements and there is a suggestion of his handling here and there, but the result remains altogether individual.

#### A LATE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH TAPESTRY

IN the Accessions Room for the present month is a beautiful Gothic tapestry, The Crucifixion, dating about 1300, which the visitor will recognize as the piece shown in the J. Pierpont Morgan Collection, a part of the second Hoentschel Collection. This piece the Museum has been fortunate enough to acquire by purchase.

It is the oldest French tapestry known.

In his book, *Les Tapisseries du 12th à la fin du 16th siècle*, Guiffrey has illustrated and called especial attention to this piece as the sole product left to us of the French looms before the middle of the fourteenth century. One can point only to the several priceless thirteenth-century tapestries preserved in the treasuries of the German cathedrals of Halberstadt and Quedlingburg as pieces of earlier date and, as such, unique examples of Romanesque loom technique. But while the German cathedrals have been fortunate in keeping their treasuries very largely intact, their French neighbors were pillaged during the long series of religious wars. As a result, this seems to be the sole example which bridges the gap between these Romanesque pieces and the rare and precious products of French art which are still preserved from the fourteenth century, when the looms of Arras were first approaching the height of their popularity and excellence. Certainly when one compares this piece with the series of the Apocalypse belonging to the Cathedral of Angers, which dates about the second half of the fourteenth century, one cannot but be struck by the greater antiquity of the Museum example. Not only are the types different, but the simplicity of figures and of draperies points to an origin that cannot be far distant from the end of the thirteenth century. The figures are in the grand style of Gothic art at the period when all the minor workmen—ivory workers, miniaturists, and as we see now in this tapestry, the tapestry weavers—were profoundly influenced by the extraordinary efflorescence of sculpture and architecture which marked the height of the Gothic development. There is as yet none of the worldliness of type which we find in work of the fourteenth century. The *Vierge Dorée* of Amiens, dating about 1288, gave impetus to, or at least marked the development toward a more realistic treatment, differing from the idealism so characteristic of thirteenth-century art. But while this movement developed among the sculptors in the later years of the century, it was probably not at once that the minor craftsmen adopted the new types, so that the attribution of this piece to the last years of